

**Insights from modeling and observational evaluation of a precipitating
continental cumulus event observed during the MC3E field campaign**

David B. Mechem¹, Scott E. Giangrande², Carly S. Wittman¹, Paloma Borque³, Tami Toto², and
Pavlos Kollias³

1. University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, USA

2. Brookhaven National Laboratory, Upton, NY, USA

3. McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

Submitted to

Journal of Geophysical Research — Atmospheres

(Accepted: January 24, 2015)

Corresponding author: David B. Mechem, Atmospheric Science Program, University of Kansas,

1475 Jayhawk Blvd., 213 Lindley, Lawrence, KS 66045

Email: dmechem@ku.edu

Phone: 785-864-5707

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Abstract

A case of shallow cumulus and precipitating cumulus congestus sampled at the Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) Program Southern Great Plains (SGP) supersite is analyzed using a multi-sensor observational approach and numerical simulation. Observations from a new radar suite surrounding the facility are used to characterize the evolving statistical behavior of the precipitating cloud system. This is accomplished using distributions of different measures of cloud geometry and precipitation properties. Large-eddy simulation (LES) with size-resolved (bin) microphysics is employed to determine the forcings most important in producing the salient aspects of the cloud system captured in the radar observations. Our emphasis is on assessing the importance of time-varying vs. steady-state large-scale forcing on the model's ability to reproduce the evolutionary behavior of the cloud system. Additional consideration is given to how the characteristic spatial scale and homogeneity of the forcing imposed on the simulation influences the evolution of cloud system properties. Results indicate that several new scanning radar estimates such as distributions of cloud top are useful to differentiate the value of time-varying (or at least temporally well-matched) forcing on LES solution fidelity.

1. Introduction

Much of the uncertainty in climate model projections stems from our limited understanding of cloud and precipitation processes, and the parameterization of these processes in global climate models (GCMs). While representing deep convective clouds in GCMs remains an ongoing problem (Stevens and Bony 2013), the treatment of shallow clouds such as stratocumulus and trade cumulus also plays a crucial role in climate system modeling. Because of their high albedo, broad areal coverage, and high radiating temperature (i.e., low, warm cloud tops), stratocumulus produce a climatologically important cooling effect on the climate system (Hartmann et al. 1992; Klein and Hartmann 1993). The moistening and cooling from shallow cumulus balance the warming and drying from large-scale subsidence. Turbulent fluxes from shallow cumulus clouds thus help determine the steady-state depth and thermodynamic properties of the trade-wind boundary layer (Riehl et al. 1951; Stevens 2007; Rauber et al. 2007) and perhaps precondition the lower atmosphere for deeper convective events (e.g., Johnson et al. 1999; Waite and Khouider 2010).

Representing shallow clouds and their transitions in GCMs is a major challenge (Bony and Dufresne 2005; Wyant et al. 2007; Medeiros et al. 2008). Typically, results from cloud-resolving models (CRMs) or large-eddy simulation (LES) models serve as benchmarks for developing and tuning single-column models (SCMs). These SCMs in turn often form the basis of parameterizations in GCMs. Thus, LES is positioned as a key tool for investigating cloud-system processes (e.g., aerosol indirect effects). For example, LES intercomparisons under the GCSS/GASS (GEWEX [Global Energy and Water Exchanges Project] Cloud Systems Study/Global

Atmospheric System Studies) framework have been fruitful (e.g., Moeng et al. 1996; Bretherton et al. 1999; Stevens et al. 2001; Brown et al. 2002; Seibesma et al. 2003; Stevens et al. 2005; Ackerman et al. 2009; van Zanten et al. 2011), and simulations from these intercomparisons have served as a benchmark for SCMs and associated parameterization development (e.g., Lenderink et al. 2004; Zhu et al. 2005; Wyant et al. 2007). However, this GCSS/GASS paradigm investigates model pathologies largely using intercomparisons of simulations, placing less emphasis on evaluating LES solutions against observational constraints. One noteworthy exception to this approach was the DYCOMS-II (Dynamics and Chemistry of Marine Stratocumulus; Stevens et al. 2003) model intercomparison (Stevens et al. 2005), in which model representations of entrainment rate were compared to innovative new aircraft observations of cloud-top entrainment (Faloona et al. 2005).

One explanation for a de-emphasis on observations is that shallow clouds are difficult to reliably sample, and our existing observational capabilities are often incompatible with high-resolution LES models. Although shallow cloud observations are collected over a handful of ground-based supersites (Stokes and Schwartz 1994; Ackerman and Stokes 2003; Illingworth et al. 2007; Mather and Voyles 2013), comprehensively sampling elusive targets such as shallow cumulus requires merging a wide array of active and passive cloud sensors, together with support from aircraft (e.g., Vogelmann et al. 2012). Newer approaches employing Doppler radar spectra can give dynamical and microphysical insights into shallow clouds, but until recently these techniques have been computationally prohibitive (e.g., Kollias et al. 2011; Luke and Kollias 2013). Adding to these challenges, the majority of high-resolution datasets has been restricted to single column, or ‘pencil beam’ measurements from millimeter-wavelength radars

that must represent transient cloud and precipitation behaviors across scales from typical LES/CRM domain sizes ($\sim 4\text{--}40\text{ km}^2$) to GCM (grid box) scales ($\sim 100\text{ km}^2$).

This study documents our preliminary effort toward a more natural coupling of LES modeling and cloud observing capabilities for one particular ground-based supersite. This site is the Oklahoma Southern Great Plains (SGP) location operated by the Department of Energy (DOE) Atmospheric Radiation Measurement (ARM) program centered at Lamont, Oklahoma. The site recently complemented its single-column measurements with new scanning radar that may better suit the sampling of LES-scale domains. We consider an application of LES with size-resolved (bin) microphysics as one avenue for capitalizing on the fine details sampled by these new radar facilities. Observations from radar systems should compare favorably with bin microphysical models that are better capable of reproducing radar measurements from drop-size distributions and high-resolution turbulent flow fields (e.g., Kollias et al. 2011). An overarching objective is to determine whether scanning radars provide useful model constraints for documenting the time-evolving structure of clouds, precipitation, and associated processes around this ARM site (Mather and Voyles, 2013; Kollias et al., 2014). An additional emphasis is to evaluate the sensitivity of cloud and precipitation properties to differences in the spatial scale and temporal details of the large-scale forcing.

We investigate the sensitivity of LES solutions to changes in spatial and temporal large-scale forcing for a challenging shallow cumulus and congestus event. We emphasize the transient nature of the forcing (i.e., time-varying vs. steady-state) and its importance on simulation outcome. This is accomplished by assessing the extent to which ensemble members reproduce salient observed macrophysical cloud field properties over the ARM facility (e.g., Xu

et al. 2002; 2005; Xie et al. 2005; Mechem et al. 2010). The counterargument, that a model must first reproduce microphysical processes in order to faithfully represent macroscale properties, is also valid. Although evaluating LES performance against macroscale cloud properties is often the easier task and the approach this study adopts, improvements to LES macroscale and microscale cloud property representations are intrinsically iterative.

The paper is outlined as follows. A synoptic overview of the event and the associated model forcing considerations is presented in Section 2. The event is analyzed using a multi-sensor observational approach and numerical simulation as described in Sections 3 and 4. A discussion on the sensitivity of LES macroscale properties as evaluated against ARM observations is provided in Section 5. Key findings are summarized in Section 6.

2. The 25 May 2011 Congestus Event: Synoptic Overview and Cloud Forcing

This study focuses on a strongly forced case of shallow cumulus transitioning to precipitating cumulus congestus. The clouds were observed on 25 May 2011 during the DOE ARM and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Global Precipitation Measurement (GPM) mission campaign, the Midlatitude Continental Convective Clouds Experiment (MC3E; Jensen et al. 2010). Clouds developed following a frontal passage and a period of deeper convection connected with a mature low-pressure system over central Kansas (Fig. 1). Shallow clouds formed over the SGP site by 1500 UTC (0900 CST). The clouds surrounding the SGP facility gradually transitioned to scattered cumulus congestus by midday (1800 UTC; 1200 CST), and isolated, comingled, precipitating congestus thereafter. Winds at cloud level naturally shifted from southwest to northwest as the low-pressure system progressed eastward by the afternoon (late UTC) hours.

An idealized perspective on the evolution of the 25 May 2011 synoptic conditions can be constructed from MC3E measurements using the variational analysis method of Zhang and Lin (1997; as also in Xie et al. 2014). These analysis fields serve as the forcing dataset for the simulations presented in this study (e.g., Fig. 2, Table 1). In addition to these multi-scale forcing datasets, the MC3E campaign launched radiosondes at 3-hour intervals from 6 locations within a 150-km radius of the SGP Lamont central facility (Jensen et al. 2015; locations highlighted in Fig. 1). Figure 2 shows time-height representations of several fields from the variational analysis product. This figure includes potential temperature and moisture advection, as well as vertical motion, at two characteristic spatial scales (75 km and 150 km). These characteristic

forcing domains are centered on the SGP central facility in Lamont, Oklahoma (Fig. 1).

Using the forcing fields in Fig. 2 as a guide, the gradual deepening of the clouds from shallow cumulus to congestus can be attributed to several factors. The northern Oklahoma region experienced positive low-level moisture advection (from the surface up to ~800 mb) throughout the event. This moist advection included moisture advected from the Gulf of Mexico wrapping around the mature low-pressure system. Throughout the day, a deep layer of cold advection (from the surface up to a level of 650–500 mb aloft, depending upon the time and analysis scale) brought the layer closer to saturation and likely promoted cloud development. Upward vertical motion overlaid low-level subsidence (or very weak vertical motion), although the relative strength of these features depended greatly on the scale of the forcing.

3. ARM SGP Site Observations and Cloud Macroscale Properties

The cloud macroscale properties selected for this 25 May 2011 LES sensitivity study rely on the radar observations now routine for the ARM SGP. For simplicity, we limit this discussion to four observational quantities when evaluating the LES ensemble solutions. Our first consideration when selecting these products is to target cloud properties simple to estimate from radar, focusing in particular on fields less susceptible to known radar challenges such as miscalibration or attenuation in cloud/rain (e.g., Ryzhkov et al. 2005; Kollias et al. 2014). Our efforts emphasize macroscale cloud properties that follow naturally from LES model outputs without the need for advanced forward-radar modeling or computations.

Historically, the ARM radar datastream most referenced for the evaluation of LES cloud simulations is the ARSCL product (Active Remote Sensing of CLOUDs; Clothiaux et al. 2000; Kollias et al. 2005). This radar product merges observations from the vertically-pointing 35-GHz Ka-band radar (KAZR), collocated laser ceilometer, micropulse lidar, and microwave radiometer to identify cloud boundaries in the vertical profile. New scanning radar capabilities complement those single column cloud insights in several ways. Precipitating cell properties are now available to within 150 km of the SGP Lamont site using the surveillance 5.4-GHz ARM C-band Scanning ARM Polarimetric weather Radar (C-SAPR) and the nearby KVNK WSR-88D (e.g., Giangrande et al. 2014). MC3E also unveiled the first generation of ARM dual-frequency 35/94-GHz (Ka/W-band) Scanning ARM Cloud Radars (SACR, e.g., Kollias et al. 2014). During MC3E, the SACR system sampled cloud elements using 2D slices (range-height; RHI) to quickly track cloud features in time and evaluate their geometric properties (e.g., Borque et al. 2014). The four

estimates of cloud-system properties as obtained from these facilities are briefly discussed below.

a. Cloud Fraction (CF)

Cloud Fraction (CF) is widely considered for model performance evaluation (e.g., Bedacht et al. 2007; Wilkinson et al. 2008; Walsh et al. 2009). Interpreting observational CF estimates that best align with model CF definitions is nontrivial, since current observations are unable to unambiguously reconstruct an instantaneous 3D cloud field (e.g., Wiscombe 2005; Wu et al. 2014). This study considers five observational definitions for CF that range from 1D, column-based radar approximations to satellite-based horizontal integrations over spatial footprints comparable to LES domain sizes. Our analysis includes the following estimates of CF:

- The 2D VISST (Visible Infrared Solar-Infrared Split Window Technique) height-integrated GOES geostationary satellite estimate. This technique estimates the ‘cloudy pixel’ area relative to the 0.5 x 0.5 degree latitude-longitude grid box that overlaps with the ARM SGP (Minnis et al. 2011).
- The CF estimates from 2D hemispheric projections obtained using an ARM Total Sky Imager (TSI) camera (Kassianov et al. 2005; Long et al. 2006).
- An estimate using shortwave radiation measurements from the ARM Solar Infrared Radiation Station (SIRS) data (Xie and Liu 2013).
- From the ARM radars, the standard ARM vertically pointing ARSCL definition that defines CF as the fraction of an hour that the radar/lidar column designates cloud echo overhead.

- A new CF approach, developed from the 25 May 2011 MC3E radar dataset (Borque et al. 2014) that uses SACR “along-wind” RHI modes. This CF estimate is defined by projecting the horizontal area covered by cloud elements sampled along the 40-km RHI slice. Since the scanning orientation follows the prevailing wind, these estimates assume cloud fraction is homogeneous over the domain in the cross-wind direction.

b. Cloud Top Distributions

Several studies of cloud populations in the tropical environment have documented cloud tops that coincide with the trade-wind inversion or the weakly stable layer often present at the melting level (e.g., Johnson 1999; Jensen and Del Genio 2006; Mechem and Oberthaler 2013). Spaceborne systems can help document cloud top distributions and evolution, especially when coupled with temperature profile information (e.g., Mace et al. 2009; Luo et al. 2010). However, spaceborne and surface weather radar methods are most reliable for documenting the cloud life cycle of cumulus congestus and deep convection. For shallow cumulus and congestus properties, the high sensitivity and rapid scanning ability of the SACR promoted sampling of the time-evolving distribution of cloud tops during the 25 May 2011 event.

Figure 3a (adapted from Borque et al. 2014) documents transitions between periods of solely shallow cumulus, periods of commingled shallow and congestus clouds, and periods of primarily congestus clouds. The modes are reflected in the cloud-top height distribution, where we see a narrow upper-level distribution mode between about 4-5 km, representing primarily cumulus congestus periods, and a broader distribution representing shallow cumulus and commingled times. Please note that although the upper portions of the congestus clouds are

colder than their tropical counterparts (Mechem and Oberthaler 2013) and may reach temperatures down to -10°C , for our simulation purposes we assume they are largely governed by warm-rain microphysical processes (an assumption we address in Sec. 4c). Precipitation onset and the subsequent generation of cold pools, in this case, are reflected in the cloud top distribution. We confirm the former by consulting the corresponding rainfall rate time series based on nearby ARM systems (Fig. 3b). These rainfall rate traces in Fig. 3b include measurements from the surface disdrometer in close proximity to the SACR, and an averaged C-SAPR estimate collected along the SACR scanning path. The presence of precipitating cumulus is confirmed by considering the enhancements in higher cloud top height counts at the expense of lower-topped clouds. These time-height distributions complement traditional CF estimates less capable of differentiating multi-layer or commingled cloud types. However, these observations from the 25 May 2011 SACR dataset are somewhat noisy and reflect some limits of the current ARM single radar sampling strategies (only approximately 2.5 hours of data from the date under investigation). Thus, a combination of multi-platform observations (e.g., ARSCL, TSI, SIRS, GOES), for cross-validation, provides additional support for interpretations of the limited SACR observations.

Despite the single-column limitations mentioned above, the KAZR-ARSCL product provides an additional perspective on cloud system behavior over the period (Fig. 4). From 1500–1700 UTC, the KAZR does not capture the isolated shallow cumulus visible in the TSI (not shown). However, starting at 1700 UTC, the radar does sample a cloud layer that deepens and increases in cloud fraction over the next 2 hours. Designated cloud top heights then undulate by ~ 1 km in height from 1900–2100 UTC. KAZR-ARSCL cloud tops and hydrometeor fraction

(Figs. 4a and b) hint at the bimodal (multi-layer) cloud structure suggested by the SACR statistics in Fig. 3. Some differences in cloud statistics in Figs. 3. and 4 during overlapping sequences may be partially attributable to fundamental differences in scanning strategies and capture volumes between the Ka-SACR (RHI) and the KAZR (profiling).

c. Areal Precipitation Fraction and Totals

A common weather radar application is to document surface rainfall accumulation and precipitating cell properties (e.g., Doviak and Zrnic 1993). For climate model applications, this may include properties such as domain-mean precipitation rate, accumulation, and time-varying behaviors. Fractional area of a representative domain covered by precipitation is one such property and is analogous to spatially averaged CF estimates. For this study, precipitation area fraction can be estimated from the C-SAPR dataset by calculating the area covered by near-surface radar reflectivity factor Z exceeding a minimum threshold. The selection of a 30-dBz threshold is based on previous warm-season precipitation studies in the vicinity of the ARM SGP site (e.g., Giangrande et al. 2012; Giangrande et al. 2014). To allow for a range of radar measurement uncertainty in light rain conditions, this study considers a spread of area fraction corresponding to a less-restrictive 25-dBz threshold and a more-restrictive 30-dBz threshold.

For domain-mean precipitation accumulations, the simulations are forced with horizontally homogeneous profiles representative of 75-km and 150-km diameter circles centered on SGP Lamont. Radar rainfall products are available at high resolution and may be resampled to those domains. The variational approach that generated the forcing datasets was constrained using surface precipitation estimates from the Arkansas River Basin Forecast Center

(ARBFC) 4x4 km hourly WSR-88D radar–surface gauge hybrid rainfall product (e.g., Young et al. 2000). The forcing from the variational analysis is therefore constrained by these mean rainfall estimate products, which should then be reflected in model behavior. However, the influence of this precipitation constraint on the forcing (mediated through diabatic heating and drying of the column) should be weak based on the small value of domain-mean precipitation relative to cases involving substantial precipitation (e.g., Xie et al. 2014). We compare LES domain-mean rainfall properties to those from an unattenuated standard gauge-adjusted WSR-88D radar rainfall product, the National Mosaic and Multi-Sensor Quantitative Precipitation Estimation (NMQ) product (e.g., Zhang et al. 2005). For this event, the accumulations were nearly identical to those of the ingested ARBFC products, providing additional confidence in the quality of these areal precipitation estimates.

4. Large-eddy Simulation

a. Model Configuration and Microphysics

All simulations here use the System for Atmospheric Modeling — Explicit Microphysics (SAMEX). SAMEX employs the anelastic dynamical core from the System for Atmospheric Modeling (SAM; Khairoutdinov and Randall 2003) and has been successfully used in a number of numerical modeling efforts (van Zanten et al. 2011; Kogan et al. 2012; Mechem et al. 2012). In this study, we configure SAMEX in a manner roughly similar to that of the RICO (Rain in Cumulus over the Ocean; Rauber et al. 2007) trade cumulus intercomparison (van Zanten et al. 2011). For these simulations, SAMEX employs a horizontal grid spacing of 100 m and a constant vertical spacing of 50 m. Previous studies demonstrate the importance of using fine vertical grid spacing for representing cumulus congestus (Khairoutdinov et al. 2009; Mechem and Oberthaler 2013). The number of grid points is 384x384x160 to yield a domain size of 38.3x38.3x8 km³, a volume that captures the cloud system mesoscale variability reasonably well. This experimental setup is employed as a starting point for the simulation suite. A simulation quadrupling the horizontal domain area (768x768x160 points) exhibits similar behavior to our baseline grid configuration for the majority of the simulation period.

SAMEX employs an explicit representation of microphysical processes (Kogan 1991) that includes size-resolving representations of droplets and cloud condensation nuclei (CCN). The model predicts distribution functions for CCN and liquid droplets, and solves the stochastic collection equation for the droplet spectra at all model grid points. As mentioned in Sec. 3b, our simulations assume warm-rain microphysical process dominate. The SAMEX configuration for

our simulations uses 19 CCN bins and 34 mass-doubling droplet bins that range in size from 1 μm to 2.05 mm in radius. The number of bins is the same as used in the RICO trade cumulus (van Zanten et al. 2011) and VOCALS southeast Pacific stratocumulus (Mechem et al. 2012) simulations. We assume an initial CCN concentration of 425 cm^{-3} (at a supersaturation $S = 0.47\%$) as directly measured from the ARM CCN counter at SGP, distributed in a lognormal spectrum with geometric mean radius of $0.03\text{ }\mu\text{m}$ and standard deviation of $1.28\text{ }\mu\text{m}$. This spectral shape is similar to that used in previous RICO and VOCALS simulations. In our experience, simulation results are more sensitive to differences in total aerosol concentration than they are to modest differences in aerosol distribution shape. We more rigorously address this assumption in Sec. 4c. Our simulations neglect shortwave and longwave heating, which we justify given that the magnitude of the large-scale forcing appears to be the most dominant factor governing cloud-system evolution. Short-duration simulations including longwave and shortwave radiative forcing exhibit only minor differences relative to the simulations without radiative forcing.

b. Model Initial Conditions and Forcing

All simulations use the semi-diagnostic modeling framework in which the model responds to observationally-constrained forcing fields of temperature and moisture (e.g., Wu et al. 1998; Xu et al. 2002, 2005; Xie et al. 2005; Zeng et al. 2009; Mechem and Oberthaler 2013). Figure 2 shows the large-scale advective tendencies, vertical motion, and surface heat and moisture fluxes imposed as forcing for the simulations. Although we refer to these quantities as “large-scale,” they are characterized by 75- and 150-km analysis scales shown in Fig. 1 and

therefore include some degree of mesoscale variability, in addition to contributions from the synoptic and planetary scales. Table 1 summarizes the forcing configurations for the seven simulations in our ensemble, largely differing in the way the forcing fields are imposed (e.g., time-varying vs. steady-state). The forcing terms in Table 1 are an attempt to distill each forcing profile (which vary in the vertical and, depending on the simulation, in time) shown Fig. 2 into a single “bulk” number for each forcing quantity.

The control simulation (1200v_75) assumes horizontally homogeneous initial profiles of temperature, moisture, and momentum from the 75-km-scale variational analysis at 1200 UTC. Over the course of the 9-hour simulation, profiles of time-varying horizontal advection and vertical velocity are imposed on the domain (see the shaded boxes covering the 1200–2100 UTC period on the 75-km-scale panels in Fig. 2). We consider the first three hours of the simulation as a model spin-up period, until the integrated turbulent kinetic energy (TKE, not shown) reaches a near-steady state. Thus, the discussion of simulation results Section 5 includes only the final 6 simulation hours. Over the simulation period from 1200–2100 UTC, all vertical levels below 600 mb exhibit negative potential temperature (cold) advection (Fig. 2a and b). Since the advection over this layer is largely constant with height, we surmise that the effect on static stability over the cloud layer is minimal; in other words, the cold advection has neither a stabilizing nor a destabilizing influence. However, all else being equal, stronger cold advection will promote saturation (and hence cloud development) more quickly. Moisture advection (Figs. 2c and d) is significantly positive below 800 mb, which should enhance instability over the course of the simulation. At 1200 UTC, subsidence dominates the large-scale vertical motion field below 600 mb (particularly at the 75-km scale; Fig. 2e), and the magnitude

of subsidence decreases over the course of the simulation. Thus, the stabilizing effect of subsidence on the mean stratification should decrease with time.

The potential temperature and moisture advection at the 150-km scale (1200v_150 simulation) is qualitatively similar to those terms at the 75-km scale, although the moistening is shallower and overlaid by a layer of weak drying. The large-scale vertical velocity fields, however, differspu substantially. The layer of subsidence below 650 mb that is slowly weakening with time at the 75-km scale is replaced at the 150-km scale with an elevated layer of ascent. Note that the values of vertical velocity over the course of the simulations are rather weak relative to the strong ascent associated with the frontal passage that occurred between 0200 and 0300 UTC. Thus, the effect of the large-scale vertical velocity on simulation outcomes is not obvious *a priori*.

All other simulations assume the forcing is constant in time. For example, in the 1800s_75 simulation, initial conditions are taken from 1800 UTC, and the same 1800 UTC forcing is imposed over the entire 9-hour simulation. These steady-state, fixed-in-time simulations serve to evaluate the importance of the evolutionary nature of the forcing. Although we refer to the simulations as “steady-state,” the simulations reach a condition resembling steady-state behavior only during the final hours of the simulations. Moreover, imposing constant forcings over the course of a simulation may have unintended consequences. One simulation (1200s_75, not shown) develops a spurious, unphysical layer of mid-level cloud that results from constantly imposing moistening and cooling over the entire course of the simulation.

c. Additional Model Considerations

Our simulations employ CCN concentration as measured at the surface. We assume that this measured concentration is representative of CCN at cloud base, which in the well-mixed boundary layer present in this case is a reasonable assumption. We argue above in Sec. 4a that simulated cloud properties are more sensitive to differences in total aerosol concentration than they are to modest differences in aerosol distribution shape. Thus, for this study we use the spectral shape we have employed previously in simulations of RICO and VOCALS cases. We evaluate this conjecture by conducting a variation of the 1200v_75 simulation where the total CCN concentration is maintained, but the breadth (standard deviation) of the CCN spectrum is increased by 50%. Differences between the two simulations (not shown) are miniscule, particularly for integrated quantities such as boundary layer depth and total precipitation. This finding is unsurprising given the strong congestus updrafts contain large values of supersaturation likely to activate all but the smallest of hygroscopic aerosol. Exploring differences in CCN concentration would be a natural choice for additional sensitivity simulations but is beyond the scope of the present study.

Because the cloud tops of some cumulus congestus within the domain may lie above the 0°C line, ice may be present. Congestus clouds are typically thought to be dominated by warm-rain, collision-coalescence processes (Lasher-Trapp et al. 2001; Mechum and Oberthaler 2013), though ice-phase processes may play a role in deeper congestus (Johnson et al. 1999). The bin-microphysics parameterization represents the evolution of only the liquid part of the condensate. However, in an attempt to estimate the importance of ice-phase processes for this event, we conducted additional bulk microphysical simulations of the 1200v_75 and 1500s_75

cases. These simulations used the 2-moment Morrison et al. parameterization (Morrison et al. 2005), with and without ice-phase processes. For these tests, ice-phase processes had only a modest effect on the simulation results, increasing accumulated precipitation by ~8% and ~6% in the 1200v_75 and 1500s_75 simulations, respectively. Furthermore, radar observations for this event also suggest the reasonableness of the warm-rain assumption. In particular, the observed cloud behaviors in Borque et al. (2014) demonstrate the lack of a prominent radar bright band / ice-media melting signature. When a bright band is visible on radar, very little cloud depth extends above it.

5. Ensemble Performance for the 25 May 2011 Event

A snapshot of the model-generated radar reflectivity field for the 1200v_75 control simulation at 1500 UTC shows an array of shallow cumulus, deeper cumulus clouds, and strongly precipitating cumulus congestus (Fig. 5). Mean LES ensemble member performance metrics and time series of LES ensemble and observational results for the 25 May 2011 event are presented in Tables 2-3 and Figs. 6-8, respectively. The tables document LES results according to two periods of 3-hour averages of the cloud field properties that are representative of “early event” periods (3 h to 6 h simulation time; 1500–1800 UTC; Table 2) and “late event” periods (6 h to 9 h simulation time; 1800–2100 UTC; Table 3). These periods were determined according to the observed precipitation onset time (~6h simulation time; 1800 UTC). For the time-varying forcing configurations (labeled ‘v’ in Table 1), early and late event breakdowns should roughly correspond to the intervals of shallow cumulus (early) and subsequent precipitating congestus (late) conditions. For the steady-state runs (labeled ‘s’ in Table 1), early period averages reflect LES solutions from the 3-hour period (3h to 6h) that immediately followed the 3-hour model spin-up. Late event results highlight the cloud properties from the final 3-hour period (6h to 9h), at a time when the observations and all featured simulations indicate precipitating clouds.

a. Cloud Fraction

Cloud fraction observations and simulation results are summarized in Fig. 6. The different observational CF estimates are consistent (~70–90% CF) over the later period, when

congestus were present. A significant spread in estimates was observed during the shallow cumulus period prior to precipitation onset (~10–90% CF). The VISST satellite-based product (“GOES low+med” in Fig. 6) estimated the largest CF, with a sizeable component of this CF value attributed to mid-to-upper level clouds (~8 km altitude) wrapping into the northern sections of the domain. The CF values estimated by narrower field-of-view ARM sensors (TSI, SIRS, and ARSCL) were consistent with campaign visual reports of scattered low cumulus transitioning to a more overcast cloud field populated by congestus (e.g., Figs. 4 and 6). The SACR CF estimate adopted by this study was unavailable prior to 1830 UTC, and when available reported the lowest CF values when congestus were present (~60%). TSI and satellite images indicate that the discrepancy is partially the consequence of directional sampling limitations. Specifically, the SACR scanning prioritized a direction along the prevailing northwesterly wind such that half of the radar RHI was performed toward the southeast, the region least favorable for cloud development.

For the early cloud period, all LES solutions ostensibly overestimated CF (Fig. 6, gray and black shading and control lines; Table 2) compared to the median observational estimate of 0.49 calculated from 1500 to 1800 UTC. Comparisons with CF observations suggest the most credible shallow cumulus representation was obtained when applying time-varying forcing conditions initiated at 1200 UTC (1200v_75, 1200v_150). These two forcing configurations include the constraints that we expected would best capture the time-evolution of cloud system properties for this challenging transition event. A reversal in model–observation CF characteristics was observed following precipitation onset, with the ensemble members underpredicting the CF associated with the congestus mode as compared to the observational

consensus (e.g., Fig. 6, Table 3). One noteworthy exception was the 2100s_75 simulation that predicted extensive cloud coverage associated with low-topped cumulus (cloud top heights of ~3 km, Table 3). The time-evolving forcing configurations, and the steady-state configurations corresponding to the times when congestus were present, typically resulted in higher CF values and better agreement with CF observations during the late-event period. Beyond 9 hours, several of the steady-state runs trend toward a domain-limited behavior of a few prominent cloudy cells.

The usefulness of CF comparisons beyond this basic qualitative agreement is not clear. Cloud fraction is an important quantity via its influence on the radiation budget, and therefore it constitutes a bulk measure of the cloud system that models should strive to simulate. However, as a tool for diagnosing model pathologies (i.e., the root cause of model–observation mismatch and how to fix it), CF is inadequate. Furthermore, the SAMEX modeling framework is highly idealized and assumes horizontally homogeneous initial conditions and forcing. For this study, the prevailing forcing of positive moisture advection and negative potential temperature advection (e.g., Table 1) is conducive to simulating the observed transition from shallow clouds to a field that includes both shallow cumulus and congestus. The homogeneity of forcing, however, dictates that clouds initiate with an equal likelihood everywhere within our LES domain. In other words, cloud behavior is statistically homogeneous across the model domain, in contrast to the highly variable spatial structure visible in Fig. 1. The SACR observations, on the other hand, indicate a cloud population that is not statistically homogeneous. For this reason, CF metrics between the statistically homogeneous simulations and the horizontally heterogeneous observational cloud field may differ substantially.

During the later period when congestus are present, LES CF values are closer to the observations (median value of 0.85 from 1800 to 2100 UTC). Based on similar arguments as above, this agreement may be fortuitous. We note that LES solutions progress towards stronger isolated congestus reminiscent of the deep precipitating congestus clouds sampled by the C-SAPR. However, the LES behavior of a simple evolution from shallow cumulus to isolated deeper congestus conflicts with the complexity found in the ARM CF observations that favor the coexistence of a spectrum of cloud depths; these include the deep, strongly precipitating congestus, and also weaker congestus elements and commingled shallow cumulus clouds. Although we cannot address this discrepancy with certainty, we speculate that the differences may arise from the highly idealized nature of the forcing, particularly in two respects: First, since the piecewise continuous forcing is applied at three-hour intervals, we should not necessarily expect the model to reproduce fine-scale cloud behavior in time. Second, the forcing profiles and doubly periodic boundary conditions impose an assumption of statistical homogeneity across the simulation domain, whereas the observed transient cloud system exhibits substantial horizontal variability over the same scale.

b. Cloud Top Distributions

LES cloud-field median and 90th percentile tops for all simulations (Tables 2, 3) were consistent with SACR and ARSCL observations of the tail end of distributions of shallow cumulus transitioning to later congestus. The 90th percentile values typically range from top heights less than 4 km early, to heights of 5.5–6 km at later stages. In this simple manner, the two-

dimensional SACR observations are immediately useful for providing a more realistic range for cloud top and bottom heights (e.g., Fig. 3) as compared to traditional column-based radar observations (e.g., Fig. 4). Further, SACR time series depictions of the cloud top distributions (Fig. 3) provide additional support for scrutinizing the evolution of LES cloud fields. For this event, the results emphasize the benefits of forcing that closely mimics observations (either time-varying or well-matched to the observational period of interest). For example, the most accurate depiction of the cloud top distribution is found when using the time-varying forcing (1200v_75, 1200v_150). These simulations properly capture the bimodal cloud top features in the observations (Fig. 3, 4) and suitably delay the initiation of significant congestus to better match with precipitation onset timing (see the precipitation onset lines in Fig. 7 and the evolution of precipitating echo area in Fig. 8). The 1500 UTC and 1800 UTC steady-state forcings also developed bimodal cloud top behaviors (Fig. 7) characteristic of those observation times. The reason for the bimodal cloud behavior is not clear, but preliminary analysis suggests that variations in low-level stability may lead to differences in cloud depth, precipitation initiation, and subsequent cloud-system behavior. The early steady-state forcing conditions (1200 UTC) preclude rapid development of precipitating congestus, whereas using later steady-state forcing (2100 UTC) results in a cloud population with characteristic tops inconsistent with observations (e.g., Fig. 7). Although SACR insights are beneficial, the limits of the SACR scanning strategy employed for the 25 May 2011 case suggests that additional radars and scanning modes are required to fully characterize three-dimensional distributions of cloud properties.

c. Precipitation Behavior

In following the progression towards deeper congestus, LES ensemble members overestimate the areal coverage and amount of precipitation (Fig. 8, Table 3). The temporal variability of precipitation fraction (area fraction ~ 0.01 – 0.1) and the mean precipitation over the domain from the LES lacks the slower, gradual build-up of these precipitation quantities as viewed by the C-SAPR. Nevertheless, new radar insights still suggest some benefit to well-matched forcing conditions. For example, early (3h–6h) sequences from the 1800 UTC runs (Table 2) predicted reasonable 3-hour average or accumulated behaviors for radar cloud tops (~ 4.5 – 5.0 km), CF (~ 0.7 – 0.9), precipitation totals (~ 0.5 – 0.6 mm), and areal fraction (~ 0.05 – 0.08), as compared to the observations between 1800–2100 UTC. Of all the simulations, the 1200 UTC time-varying runs performed best at capturing the extended event and cloud transition, as gauged by the time-evolving areal coverage and rainfall totals. In particular, the later precipitation onset in these simulations better matched the observed precipitation onset. Precipitation totals for the two time-varying simulations were in the middle of the ensemble (~ 1.2 mm of total precipitation), and the modest areal fraction (< 0.01 early, 0.05 late) compared favorably to observations.

The authors include forcings at multiple scales (75 km, 150 km) in Table 1 to highlight the challenges when attempting to interpret the impact of forcing scale on precipitation behavior. Total precipitation rates for the 1800s_75 and 1800s_150 simulations are similar (1.28 vs. 1.46 mm d^{-1}), yet the temperature advection, moisture advection, and vertical motion differ substantially (Table 1). These results suggest a balance whereby the weaker temperature and moisture advection in the 150-km simulation are compensated for by enhanced upward

vertical motion. We note that strong large-scale ascent was not typical of the model configurations that represented precipitation onset timing favorably relative to the observations. For example, the run with the highest precipitation (1500s_75) featured the least favorable large-scale vertical motion, but the highest moisture advection. Ultimately, the ability to predict the evolution of cloud and precipitation properties from these simple bulk measures of forcing in Table 1 is limited. This simplistic interpretation of the forcing also fails to diagnose unexpected behavior in select runs, such as the 2100s_75 simulation that initiates densely packed precipitating cumulus that bear no resemblance to the cloud radar observations. As we mention above in Sec. 5b, results suggest that differences in low-level stability may be important in controlling the initial precipitation onset, a notion we will explore in further study of our simulation ensemble.

For radar-based observations from the C-SAPR and WSR-88Ds, the choice of spatial scale had little impact on the precipitation properties considered. Although the choice of scale was influential to the performance of several of the LES runs, there was no indication that a particular LES forcing configuration (75 or 150 km) was consistently preferable. The finding may be loosely attributed to the offsetting nature of several bulk forcing measures discussed above. Specifically, stronger large-scale upward motion was associated with reduced moisture and potential temperature advection contributions. Differences in forcing contributions do not always combine to produce such a serendipitous balance, however. For example, the 1500 UTC simulations exhibited a dramatic spread between the 75 km and 150 km domain variants (e.g., Tables 2 and 3), with the 1500s_150 run yielding the smallest 6-hour total precipitation (0.61 mm), in best agreement with the observations. In comparison, the 1500s_75 run rapidly

553 initiated precipitation and predicted the highest 6-hour total (1.66 mm), but better reflected
554 the areal and cloud field properties of the observations.

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6. Conclusions and Key Findings

SAMEX solutions with forcing more closely matched to observations captured several key aspects of the 25 May 2011 cloud event. Our results were encouraging, given the substantial synoptic variability and the highly idealized modeling framework. Here, we present our initial investigations into the sensitivity of LES solutions to changes in spatial and temporal large-scale domain forcing. Our emphasis was to evaluate whether newer scanning radar technologies for cloud and precipitation properties would benefit our effort to assess the influence of the transient nature of the forcing (i.e., time-varying vs. steady-state) on simulation outcome. A summary of the key findings is as follows.

Our initial findings indicate that measurements obtained from scanning radar such as cloud-top height distributions better highlighted the differences across the SAMEX simulations. SAMEX simulations initiated using the time-varying forcing configurations better captured cloud regime transitions for this event. While this result may be expected, a preference toward these time-varying runs may not have been as apparent if evaluated according to simpler bulk metrics of cloud properties (cloud fraction, base, or top). There were promising indications that an improved characterization of cloud field spatial inhomogeneities from multiple scanning radar observations or additional measures of horizontal cell distributions (from additional scanning modes) may help differentiate preferable model configurations. Here, simplified attempts to consider more detailed, multidimensional measures of cloud and precipitation geometry from scanning radar systems (e.g., precipitation onset, precipitation area, cloud-top PDFs) demonstrated several key advantages for the time-varying forcing. For example, the cloud-top

PDF formulated from the SACR (Fig. 3) and KAZR-ARSCL (Fig. 4) were instructive for highlighting a transition to a bimodal cloud system behavior, helping to identify which LES runs were capable of reproducing these features (Fig. 7). Area-mean model precipitation fields exhibited greater short-term temporal variability relative to the observations but were reasonable when averaged over an appropriate timescale. Some of these discrepancies may be attributed to the demanding nature of attempting to model isolated congestus using idealized LES simulations over a relatively small domain forced with horizontally homogeneous conditions.

For this event, the characteristic scale of the analysis domain (75 km, 150 km) did not yield significant differences in the observations, although select simulation results were found sensitive to scale of the forcing (e.g., differences in precipitation for the two 1500 UTC simulations). Linking persistent biases in simulation results to differences in the scale of the forcing or bulk measures of forcing terms (e.g., Table 1) was difficult, however, suggesting that bulk representations of forcing quantities are insufficient in understanding cloud system evolution. Understanding possible secondary linkages was also challenging. For example, total precipitation was unrelated to the LES solutions having the deepest congestus tops or greatest areal precipitation coverage. While we were encouraged by our initial explorations using scanning radar, more complete observations of cloud properties are required (multiple radar views, improved scan modes) to better constrain three-dimensional cloud behavior (e.g., cloud thickness, cloud field topology).

Most CRMs or GCMs, including models used in previous studies to represent the transition from shallow cumulus to deeper precipitating clouds, have employed bulk rather than bin microphysical parameterizations (e.g., Grabowski et al. 2006; Kuang and Bretherton

601 2006; Khairoutdinov and Randall 2006; Wu et al. 2009; Hohenegger and Stevens 2013;
602 Mechem and Oberthaler 2013). Our choice of bin microphysics was made in order to eventually
603 foster the most accurate comparisons possible with the ARM spectral radar observations. Our
604 simulation ensemble framework and comparison with a wide range of observational metrics
605 derived from ARM observations will enable future evaluations of different bulk microphysical
606 parameterizations. Performing both bin and bulk LES runs will promote not only comparisons of
607 cloud macroscale properties but also evaluations of the validity of assumptions inherent in the
608 bulk parameterizations (e.g., assumed drop-size distributions or calculations of dispersion in 2-
609 moment parameterizations).

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Acknowledgements

The authors also wish to thank the ARM Climate Research Facility for the extended dataset collection and maintenance during the MC3E campaign period. We would like to thank Michael Jensen (BNL) for comments on a draft of the manuscript, and constructive comments from three anonymous reviewers. We are grateful to Marat Khairoutdinov for making SAM available to the scientific community and to Yefim Kogan for ongoing collaborations with the microphysics component of the model. Some of the computing for this project was performed at the OU Supercomputing Center for Education and Research. Beth Tully refined Fig. 2. Observational data are available from the U.S. Department of Energy SGP ARM Climate Research Facility (<http://www.archive.arm.gov>) and the corresponding website for the Midlatitude Continental Convective Clouds Experiment (MC3E, <http://campaign.arm.gov/mc3e/>). Numerical simulation data are available on request of the corresponding author (dmechem@ku.edu), in accordance with AGU guidelines. This research was supported by the Department of Energy Office of Science grant DE-SC0006736, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Program Office (CPO) Climate Prediction Program for the Americas/Earth System Science Program (CPPA/ESS) grants NA10OAR4310160, and the Office of Naval Research award N00014-11-1-0518. This manuscript has been authored by employees of Brookhaven Science Associates, LLC under Contract No. DE-AC02-98CH10886 with the U.S. Department of Energy. The publisher by accepting the manuscript for publication acknowledges that the United States Government retains a non-exclusive, paid-up, irrevocable, world-wide license to publish or reproduce the published form

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Figure Captions

Figure 1. Synoptic configuration at 1800 UTC. Albedo from GOES visible satellite imagery is combined with isobars of the surface pressure field [in hPa] from North American Regional Reanalysis (NARR; Mesinger et al. 2006) and a multi-radar composite of reflectivity from WSR-88D NEXRAD radars. The magenta “X” represents the location of the ARM Central Facility, and the multiple “S”s indicate MC3E sounding sites. Concentric circles represent the analysis volumes of the 75-km and 150-km variation analysis domains.

Figure 2. Time-height sections of potential temperature and moisture advection, large-scale vertical velocity, and surface sensible and latent heat fluxes at two different analysis scales. The SAMEX forcing for the different simulations is constructed from different combinations of vertical profiles, denoted by the red vertical lines inside the rose boxes. The rose shading denotes the time period for which simulations are performed.

Figure 3. (a) Histogram of cloud-top heights from the SACR as a function of time. (b) Rain rate from the disdrometer at the SGP central facility and an averaged radar-derived estimate from the C-SAPR using a standard Oklahoma Z–R relationship along the SACR scanning path. Shaded regions indicate the presence of precipitation as recorded by the disdrometer, and arrows in (b) indicate periods of heavier area-mean precipitation measured by the C-SAPR. Adapted from Borque et al. (2014).

Figure 4. (a) Frequency of occurrence of highest cloud top under 6 km, calculated from KAZR–ARSCl cloud top product and binned in intervals of 20 minutes in time and 250 m in the vertical. (b) Time-height section derived from KAZR–ARSCl of hydrometeor fraction, averaged over 20-minute intervals, overlaid with cloud top (black dots).

Fig. 5. Snapshot of the simulated reflectivity field from the 1200v_75 control simulation, calculated directly from the bin-microphysics drop size distributions. (a) Plan view of column-maximum reflectivity. Solid black contours are 0 dBz, representative of typical C-band radar sensitivity. (b) and (c) represent vertical cross sections taken through the northern and southern regions of the domain in (a).

Figure 6. A series of imagery from the TSI (top). Five observational estimates of cloud fraction, all denoted by blue lines overlaid on cloud fraction calculated from the simulation suite (bottom). The black line represents the control (1200v_75) simulation. The dashed gray line is the ensemble median, and the gray bands represent the minimum and maximum cloud fraction values of the simulation ensemble. The rose shaded area indicates the period covered by the TSI images.

Figure 7. Time-varying PDFs of cloud-top height for six of the simulations. The white line represents the time of precipitation onset, taken to be a precipitation rate of 1 mm d^{-1} at the surface.

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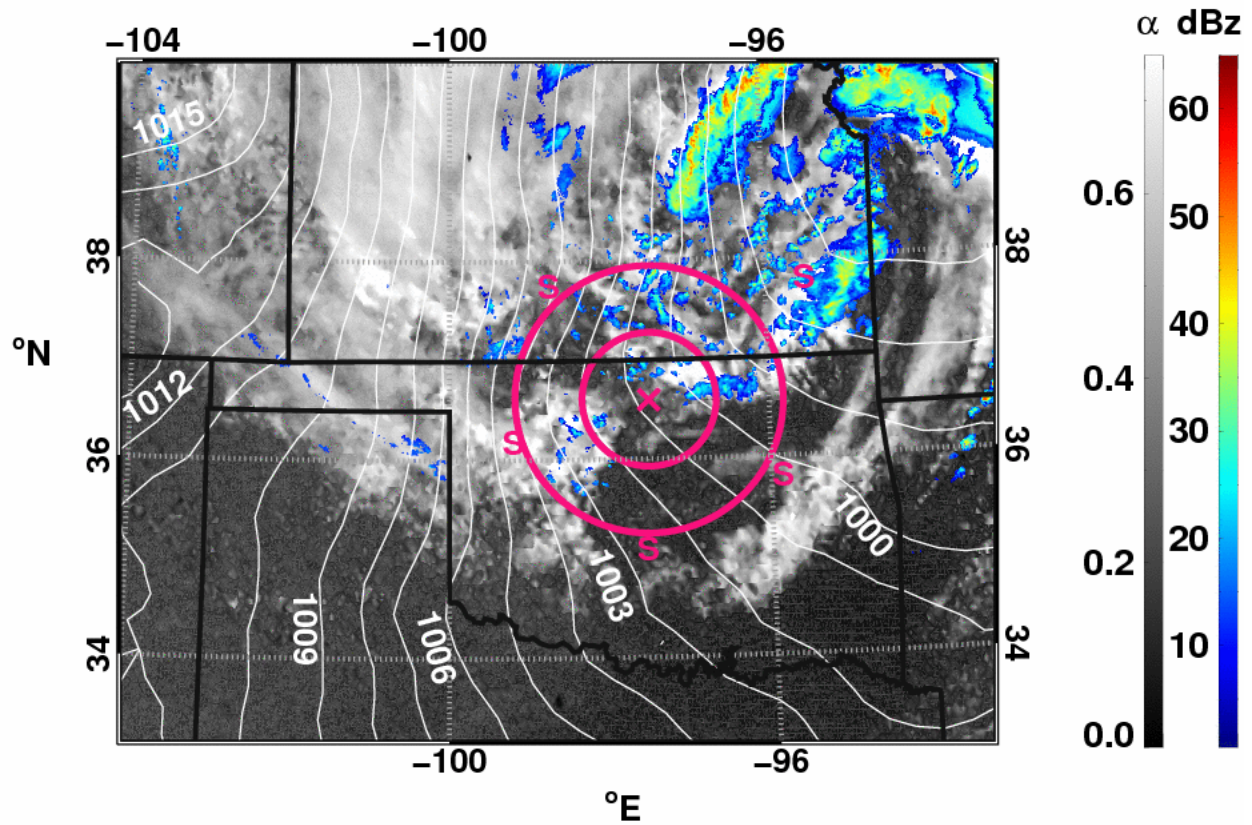
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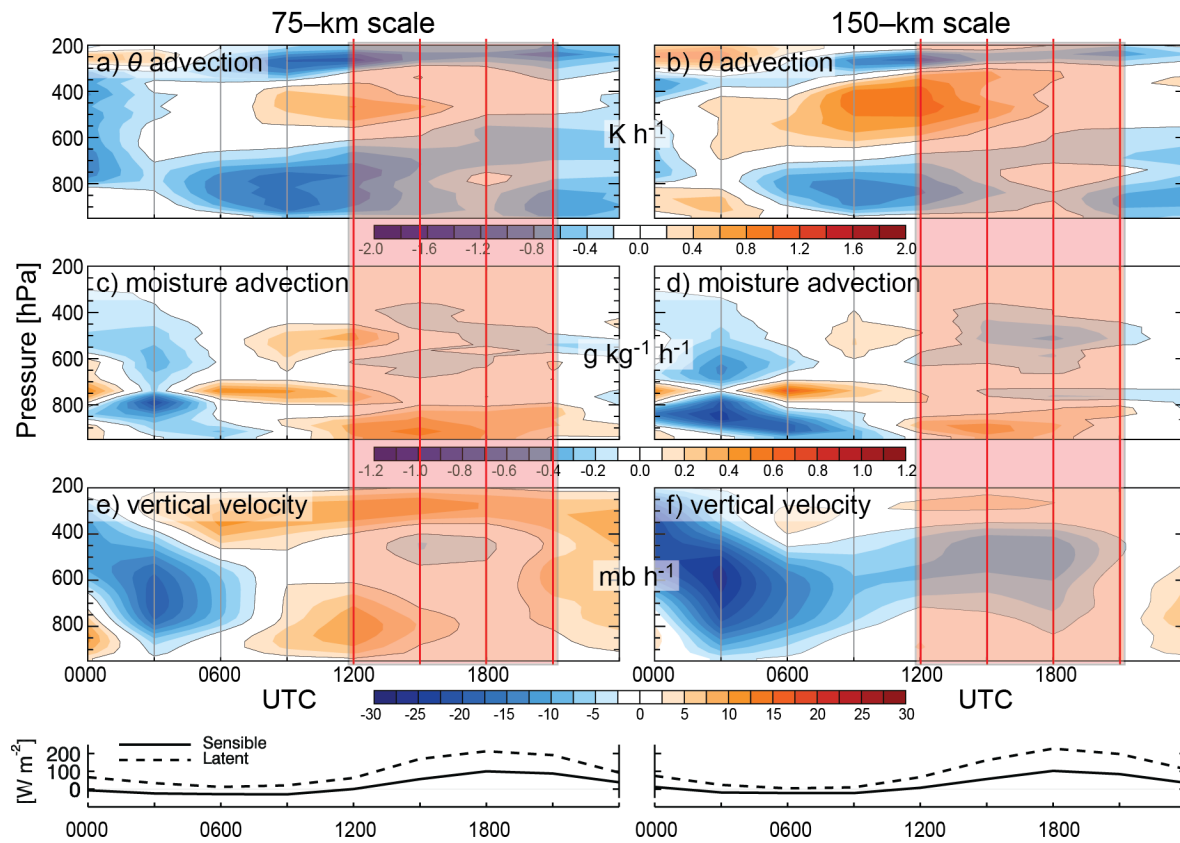


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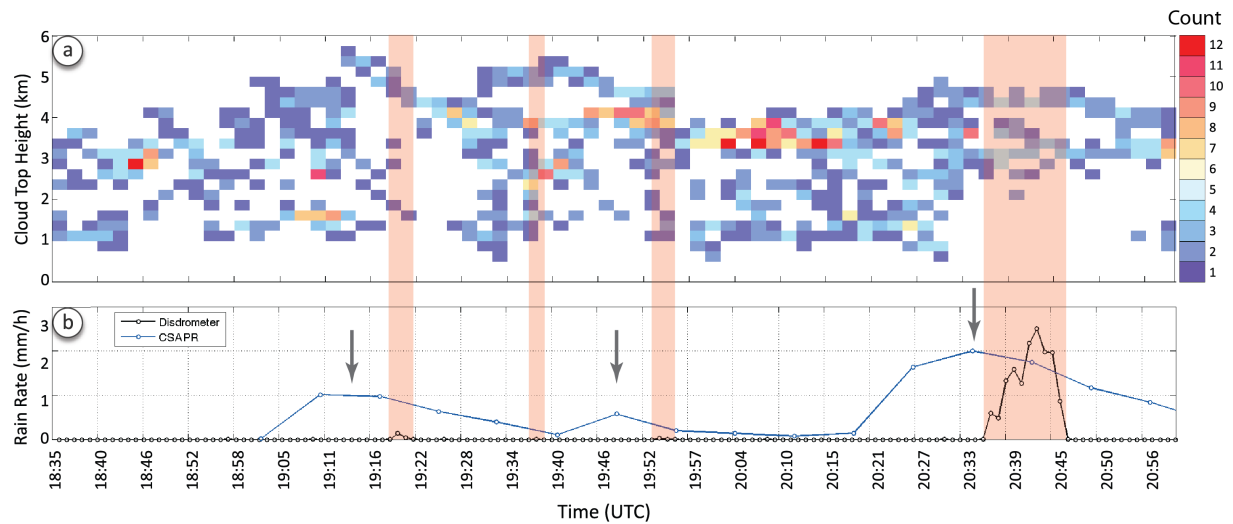
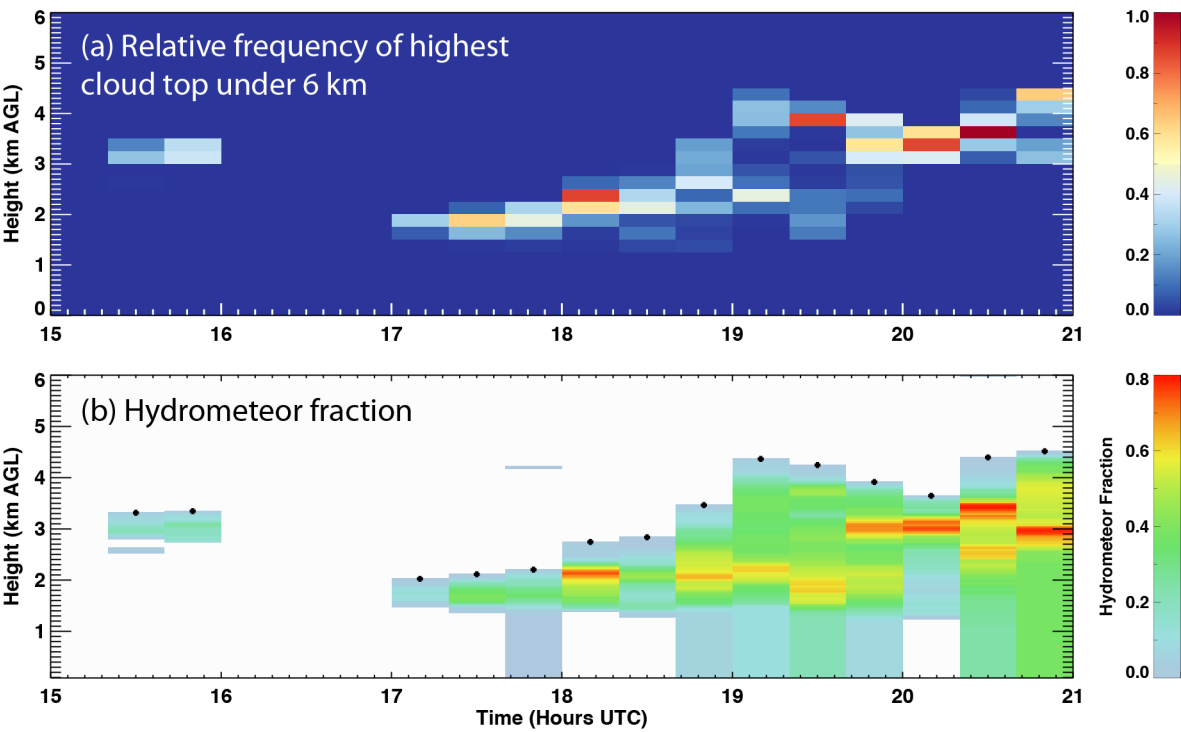


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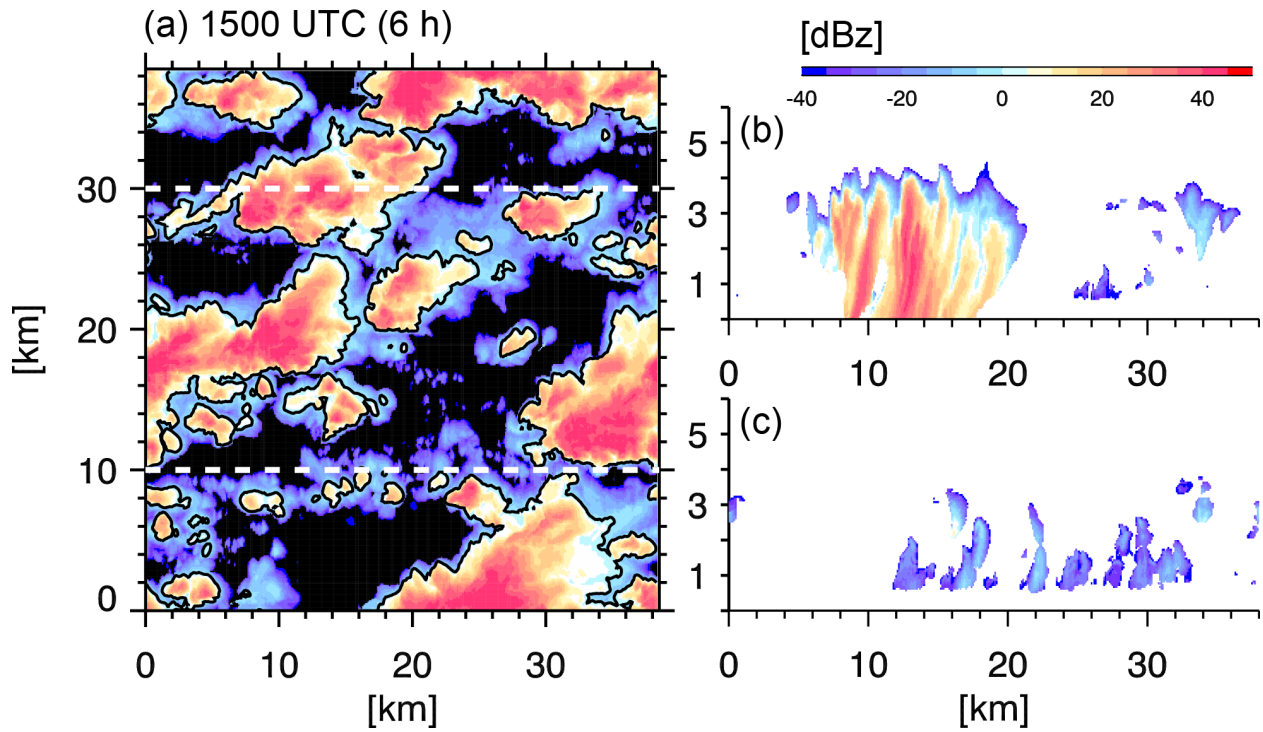
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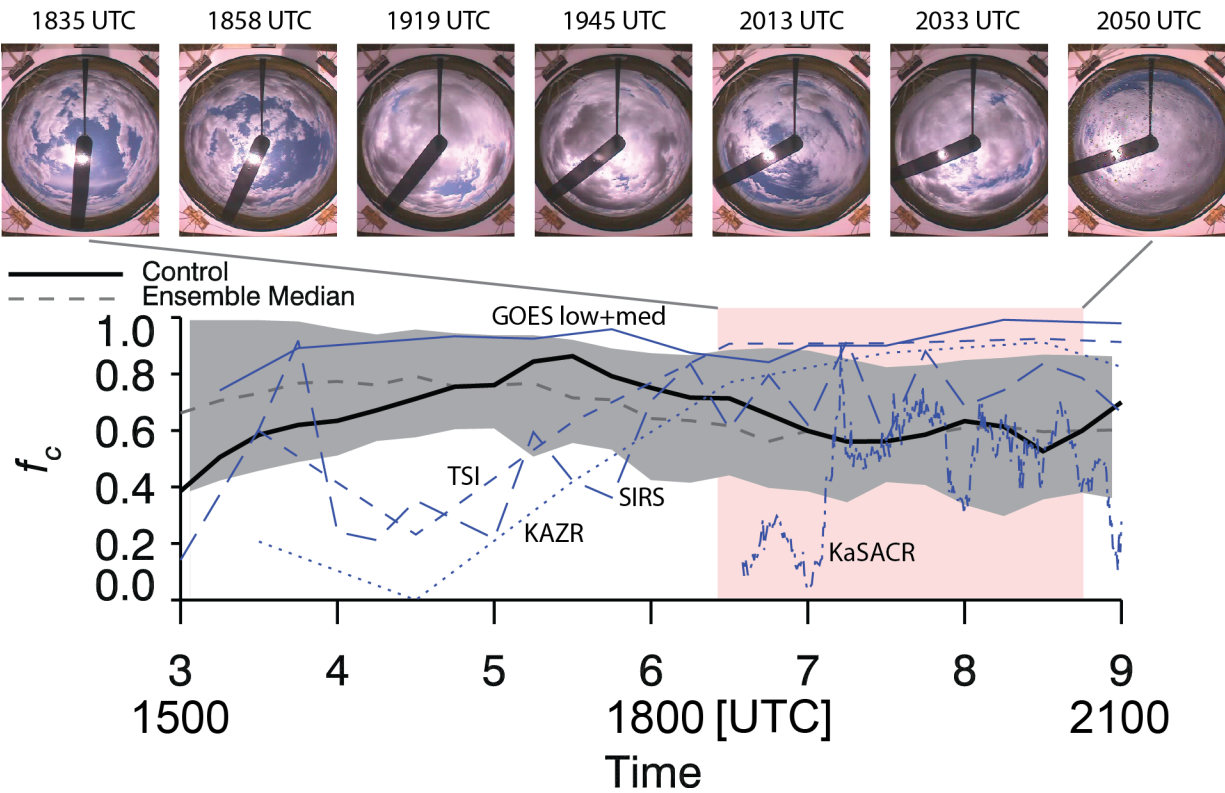
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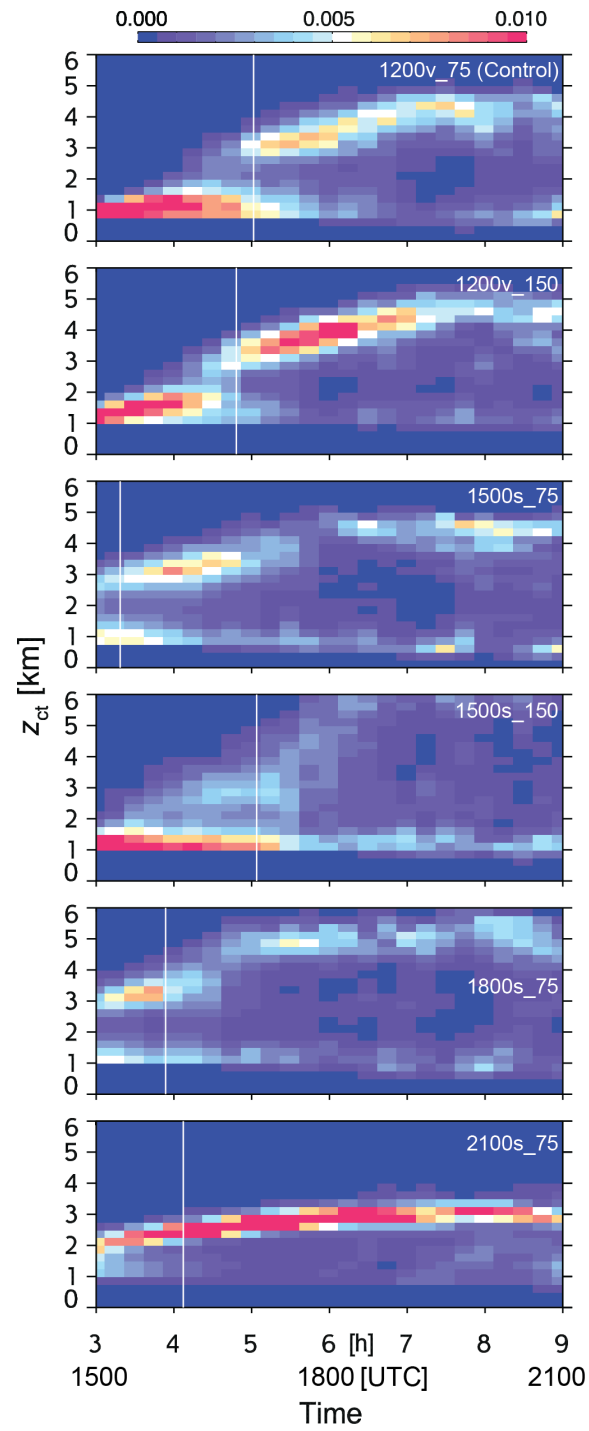
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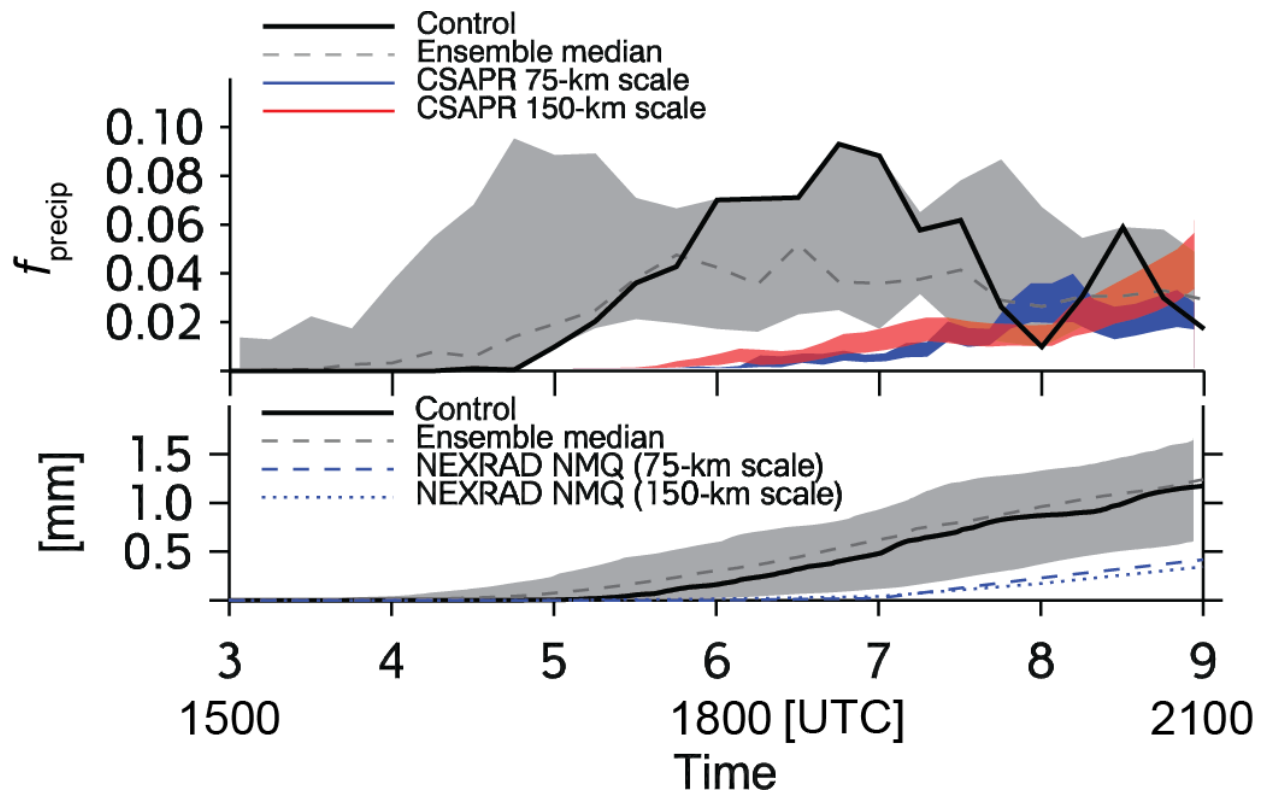


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Simulation name	Forcing scale [km]	Time-varying/[s] steady state	Time or interval of forcing [UTC]	Potential temperature advection [K h ⁻¹]		Moisture advection [g kg ⁻¹ h ⁻¹]		Vertical motion [mb h ⁻¹]	
1200v_75	75	v	1200–2100	-0.40	-0.30	0.17	0.13	1.33	1.31
1200v_150	150	v	1200–2100	-0.17	-0.25	0.10	0.02	-1.68	-0.01
1500s_75	75	s	1500	-0.47		0.19		2.15	
1500s_150	150	s	1500	-0.24		0.13		-0.96	
1800s_75	75	s	1800	-0.32		0.15		0.52	
1800s_150	150	s	1800	-0.10		0.07		-2.40	
2100s_75	75	s	2100	-0.27		0.10		2.10	

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 1090 surface precipitation rate first reaches the threshold value of 1 mm d⁻¹); range of mean and
 1091 median precipitation area fraction (area fraction of 30 and 25 dBz echo); and total precipitation
 1092 accumulated over the 3-h period.

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Simulation name	CF	CT height [km]	Precip. onset time [h]	Precip. area fraction	Precip. [mm]
1200v_75 (Control)	0.68 (0.71)	1.80 (2.57)	5.0	0.014–0.021 (< 0.01)	0.16
1200v_150	0.74 (0.79)	2.40 (3.04)	4.8	0.014–0.024 (< 0.01)	0.28
1500s_75	0.65 (0.66)	2.85 (3.92)	3.3	0.044–0.060 (0.043–0.060)	0.59
1500s_150	0.54 (0.56)	2.16 (3.64)	5.1	0.019–0.026 (< 0.01)	0.10
1800s_75	0.73 (0.71)	3.57 (4.56)	3.9	0.047–0.064 (0.053–0.077)	0.52
1800s_150	0.87 (0.93)	3.89 (4.92)	4.0	0.050–0.066 (0.063–0.080)	0.57
2100s_75	0.91 (0.93)	2.47 (2.79)	4.1	0.010–0.020 (0.008–0.016)	0.33

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Simulation name	CF	CT height [km]	Precip. onset time [h]	Precip. area fraction	Precip. [mm]
1200v_75 (Control)	0.63 (0.61)	3.56 (4.49)	5.0	0.053–0.074 (0.059–0.078)	1.01
1200v_150	0.72 (0.71)	4.10 (4.88)	4.8	0.048–0.067 (0.047–0.059)	0.97
1500s_75	0.51 (0.55)	3.64 (4.73)	3.3	0.038–0.049 (0.032–0.043)	1.07
1500s_150	0.41 (0.38)	3.07 (6.10)	5.1	0.045–0.056 (0.045–0.051)	0.51
1800s_75	0.60 (0.60)	4.39 (5.48)	3.9	0.050–0.066 (0.053–0.069)	0.76
1800s_150	0.51 (0.48)	3.98 (5.91)	4.0	0.057–0.071 (0.058–0.074)	0.89
2100s_75	0.86 (0.87)	2.88 (3.29)	4.1	0.024–0.041 (0.024–0.039)	0.90

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